

**“What are you looking for? . . . Come and see.”**

**John 1:29-42**

**A sermon preached by Carla Pratt Keyes**

**for a Sermon for Every Sunday**

**January 15, 2023**

“What are you looking for?” These are the first words Jesus speaks in the gospel according to John. “What are you looking for?”

Type ‘em into Google, and the first most common search is *“What are you looking for in a relationship”*? On the dating app, Tinder, “What are you looking for?” is one of the questions women commonly ask, and men commonly dread. In fact, you can find articles with advice for men about how to answer that question honestly, while also making a good impression. *“What are you looking for in a job?”* is the second most common of the searches on Google. I glanced at the Harvard Business Review for insights about this and saw an article entitled “Employees Who Feel Love Perform Better.” A caring atmosphere is what they’re looking for. That article was alongside another entitled, “Your Employees Want the Negative Feedback You Hate to Give.” They want critique that will help them grow.<sup>1</sup> *What are you looking for?* The question is often reduced to things like “a good cup of coffee.” All I want is a good cup of coffee. Or “my phone.” Where the heck did I put my phone? Or even, *what WAS I looking for* when I came into this room? I can’t remember anymore . . . Even the big stuff can be a moving target, like: how did I get into this mess? *What did I want* when I started this? Or *what WILL YOU most want* in a college, say, or in a retirement community? *What are you looking for at this point in your life?*

Christ’s inaugural question invites us to discern and articulate something significant about our lives, even our deepest desires. What are we looking for?

Years ago I stumbled across a book on the Enneagram. It’s a personality typology that’s become quite popular recently. The word Enneagram just means “Model of Nine.” There are nine types. It’s a tool for discovering what motivates people, and I’ve found it surprisingly useful for understanding what I am looking for (and looking to avoid) and how that relates to what other people in my life may want to find or avoid. According to the Enneagram, some of us are wired to look for success and achievement, while others want primarily to be safe, and still others so desperately want peace, they tend to retreat in the face of conflict. Some people simply *must* express themselves, while others are cautious, wanting to do what’s right. Some are looking for love. Others are more interested in getting knowledge and becoming competent. Some are looking for what’s fun and interesting in life. Others are driven to control their environment – to shape it. There are nine main motivations. Richard Rohr, the priest and author, has worked extensively with this typology, and he explains it in such a way that it’s clear: what we’re seeking – each of us – reveals a lot about the ways we are broken and the ways we are strong. We are limited, yet also gifted people, who are striving for things that may serve the world well, or may wound the world, and ourselves in the process.<sup>2</sup> What are *YOU* looking for?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://blogs.hbr.org/2014/01/employees-who-feel-love-perform-better/>, <http://blogs.hbr.org/2014/01/your-employees-want-the-negative-feedback-you-hate-to-give/>

<sup>2</sup> Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert, *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001.

Where do you find *MEANING*? That's another way I've heard the question put. Some years ago, I attended a short Industrial Areas Foundation training. These are community organizers. I was watching their presentation from the corner, just listening to what they were saying about forging relationships and working together for change, when one of the leaders turned to me (kind of like Jesus turned to those disciples; they'd been following quietly behind him). This man asked me suddenly: Where do you find meaning in your life? Try to answer *that* question cold!

"Where do you find meaning in life?" What activities make your heart sing? What difference do you feel proud to have made in the world? What ideas stir you to action? What tragedies break your heart? Community organizers ask questions like these with an agenda. They want to uncover people's passions and spur folks to come together around those passions to have an impact in the world. Jesus Christ, whom you could think of as one of the first community organizers, will direct his disciples to change their world, too. First he asks them what they're looking for.

Their answer is a bit strange, really. They don't answer Jesus' question, yet they do. "Rabbi, where are you staying?" the disciples reply. So, first of all, they recognize Jesus as a teacher. Their "ears are open"<sup>3</sup> to hear him – as someone who is wise and worth learning from, as a trustworthy conversation partner. *They want him to be their teacher.* And they ask Jesus, "where are you staying?" The verb they use is translated elsewhere in John as "abiding." "Abide in me as I abide in you," Christ will say later in John. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love." We're still so close to Christmas; this reminds me of Luke's story and people who looked for things. First Mary and Joseph looked for a place to stay in Bethlehem. Then the shepherds looked for Jesus. And *Jesus BECAME the place to stay.* Christ is the one in whom all people are invited to abide.

The disciples don't have clarity about that yet, but they are looking for God. *Where do you abide?* they ask Jesus, using a word heavy with meaning, a word meaning-full in ways they may not yet understand. They're asking Jesus: where are you in relation to God? And what might that mean for *US* in relation to God? And Christ's response is perfect for people (then and now) who follow him, not fully knowing why . . . who come to church with questions about the whole enterprise . . . who aren't quite sure how they got here or what they want from being here. "Come and see," Jesus says. Walk this path awhile. Study the world and your place in it with me. See what moves you.

I've been moved by some things Malcolm Gladwell said in interviews around the time he wrote his book *David and Goliath*. Gladwell grew up in a Mennonite family – a very devoted family – but his journey was different than that of most of his family members: Malcolm drifted away a little bit. He stopped going to church . . . stopped thinking much about Jesus. Then he started work on *David and Goliath*. It was different from his previous books, which looked at things from a high, theoretical level (considering things like principles that govern the way we behave or how success happens). The book *David and Goliath* looks at individuals and the choices they make.

Among the people Gladwell interviewed was a Mennonite couple whose faith was evident in their response to the murder of their teenaged daughter. Both the mother and the father of this

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<sup>3</sup> I'm thinking of the Psalmist, "You have given me an open ear."

girl, while feeling heartbroken and angry, spoke early on about the path of forgiveness. At a press conference after his daughter's body was found the father said, "We would like to know who the person or persons are [who murdered her] so we could share, hopefully, a love that seems to be missing in these people's lives." Gladwell wondered: How could he say that? Where did this couple find the strength to say what they said about love and forgiveness?

Before he met them, Gladwell had been researching stories about strength and power turning up in unexpected ways – like, in dyslexic kids who'd become successful entrepreneurs or in children who'd had difficult childhoods, then grew up to be world leaders. But it was in talking to this Mennonite couple that Gladwell realized what he personally was *really* looking for. "I was interested," he says, "in the 'weapons of the spirit' – the peculiar and inexplicable power that comes from within."

In many interviews since, Gladwell has said he's in the process of rediscovering his faith. It's been a process of *coming to see* he'd been missing something . . . that there was "something incredibly powerful and beautiful in the faith that [he] grew up with that [he] was missing. [He'd been writing about people of extraordinary circumstances – strong people like that Mennonite couple . . . brave people, like the Christians of Le Chambon, who risked their lives to shelter Jews during World War II. As he heard about their strength and courage and faith, it slowly dawned on Gladwell: I can have that, too - that powerful, beautiful something. He realized how much he wanted it.<sup>4</sup>

What are you looking for? . . . Come and see. These first words of the incarnate word hold one of the most gracious invitations I know: to discern what we desire most deeply and to pursue it in the company of one who is patient with our uncertainty, our missteps, our wrong-headed striving. Jesus Christ *is* the beginning and end of all we want or need . . . but it's OK with him if we don't understand that yet. Come, learn what you want, he says. Come, figure it out. Come and see.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.relevantmagazine.com/culture/books/how-i-rediscovered-faith?fb\\_action\\_ids=10152121223109133&fb\\_action\\_types=og.recommends&fb\\_source=other\\_multiline&action\\_object\\_map=%5B565994416815996%5D&action\\_type\\_map=%5B%22og.recommends%22%5D&action\\_ref\\_map=%5B%5D](http://www.relevantmagazine.com/culture/books/how-i-rediscovered-faith?fb_action_ids=10152121223109133&fb_action_types=og.recommends&fb_source=other_multiline&action_object_map=%5B565994416815996%5D&action_type_map=%5B%22og.recommends%22%5D&action_ref_map=%5B%5D) and [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/author-malcolm-gladwell-finds-his-faith-again/2013/10/11/d633d8f4-3266-11e3-89ae-16e186e117d8\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/author-malcolm-gladwell-finds-his-faith-again/2013/10/11/d633d8f4-3266-11e3-89ae-16e186e117d8_story.html)